

ISSAQUAH'S GUIDE TO PRUNING BASICS

- Before pruning, ask yourself, “What am I trying to achieve by pruning?” Pruning is not meant to constantly control or drastically reduce the size of a tree. Consider that the tree may be inappropriate for its location in cases where this is needed.
- Good pruning can benefit the tree by removing potential hazards, increase interior light and air circulation, improve form and correct weaknesses, control decay, and promote longevity of the tree.
- Most trees seldom require pruning other than removing dead or damaged branches. However, young trees may benefit from light pruning every few years to establish the maturing shape. A good time for general pruning is winter. Early summer pruning can help control the growth of the tree.
- When pruning, remove at most 25% of the total leaf area. Less is generally better for the tree. After an extensive pruning (one that approaches 25% removal), give the tree two years to recover before pruning again.
- Homeowners may be able to prune using only a handsaw and a ladder. For larger trees, contact these websites for a list of certified arborists:
 - International Society of Arboriculture www.isa-arbor.com
 - Pacific Northwest Chapter of ISA www.pnwisa.org

Healthy Pruning Techniques	Improper Pruning Techniques
Crown Cleaning – removing dead, dying, diseased, crowded, weakly-attached, or low-vigor branches. Done correctly, this should not reduce the canopy.	Topping – cutting a trunk or main branch to the point where there is no branch large enough <u>and</u> vigorous enough to become the new leader. This has been widely done in the past, but is now inappropriate for several reasons.
Crown Thinning – selectively removing branches throughout the crown of the tree to improve interior light and air. Remaining branches should be well-distributed and balanced.	Stripping – removing the branches from the inner section of the trunk or branch (also called “liontailing”). This can result in structural imbalances and potential failure of the tree.
Crown Raising – removing the lower branches of the tree to provide height clearance, typically 8’ for pedestrians and 16’ for vehicles.	Imbalances – disrupting the structure of the tree through pruning. This can cause cracking damage from the wind through twisting. It may also cause weak new growth.
Windowing – removing several branches symmetrically within an area of the tree’s crown to enhance views (on private trees only).	Excessive Pruning – excessive cutting which can kill a tree. Stripping away branches can starve the tree and/or invite decay and disease into the tree.

For approval of pruning plans for street trees, contact Planning: (425) 837-3080.

References:

Plant Amnesty www.plantamnesty.org
 National Arbor Day Foundation www.arborday.org
 WSU Cooperative Extension <http://gardening.wsu.edu>
 Master Gardeners
An Illustrated Guide to Pruning by Edward Gilman